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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 OSLO 000161

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/02/2017

TAGS: PREL EAID KPKO NO

SUBJECT: SPECIAL ENVOY NATSIOS MEETS ERITREAN REPRESENTATIVE

Classified By: DCM Kevin M. Johnson for reasons 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: U.S. Special Envoy Andrew Natsios met with Eritrean Presidential Advisor Yemane Ghebreab in Oslo on February 10, 2007. Ghebreab stated that Eritrea is interested in a comprehensive peace in Sudan and is moving ahead with plans for a Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) parties conference in Tripoli that will include DPA signatories SLA and GOS as well as non-signatories. International observers would be welcome at the Tripoli meeting. Despite the current poor state of relations between the U.S. and Eritrea, Eritrea sees an opportunity to work with us on Sudan and Somalia.  
END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) Ghebreab stated that Eritrea was interested in assisting with a comprehensive peace in Sudan. They think that the CPA is crucial and are worried about its implementation. While not comfortable with the way that the DPA was signed, Eritreans would like to see talks between the Government of Sudan and the non-signatories.

¶3. (C) Ghebreab said that Eritrea had approached Khartoum in September about sitting down with non-signatories and was told that the DPA was it and anything outside of the DPA would be solved militarily. In October, Khartoum provided Eritrea with a statement recognizing that this approach had not succeeded and Khartoum was now ready for talks. Eritrea also followed up with non-signatories and all agreed that to exploratory talks with Khartoum without conditions.

Tripoli Conference of Parties

¶4. (C) Eritrea is working on establishing a date for the Tripoli meeting that will include the GOS, DPA non-signatories, the SLA, and the SPLM. The conference would be open to international observers and Eritrea will preside over the conference. (When asked specifically whether the USG would be invited to observe, Ghebreab responded rhetorically: "Can the US work with Eritrea?") According to Ghebreab, Khartoum agreed to the meeting as long as Eritrea was the lead, not the Libyan hosts. Ghebreab explained that Eritrea wants a comprehensive peace in Sudan, hence their interest in assisting with Darfur. Ghebreab was in Oslo at the request of the Norwegian MFA who arranged but did not attend the meeting with Special Envoy Natsios.

Eritrea Pushes for Peace Process Before Peacekeeping

¶5. (C) Asked about Eritrean views of the three-phase plan, Ghebreab stated that Eritrea is focused on peace negotiations. They are not opposed to the three-phase plan, Eritrea just thinks that it will not make a difference unless a peace settlement is in place. Darfur is too large a territory for a 17,000-person force to cover adequately, particularly when multiple factions are operating there

freely. Ghebreab feels that Sudan would support a cease-fire agreement for Darfur. Chad however may not since it feels it is now in a stronger position following Libyan support. All sides need to be pressured to reach an agreement.

¶6. (C) Asked about Khartoum's military buildup in Darfur, Ghebreab stated that this emanated from fear and that he believes Khartoum has no plans to invade Chad or go on the offensive in Darfur. However, Khartoum is not interested in a cease-fire without a political process in place.

A Message for Khartoum

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¶7. (C) Special Envoy Natsios told Ghebreab that the U.S. has only humanitarian interests in Darfur. He asked Ghebreab to relay to Khartoum that recent attacks against NGOs working in Darfur have brought the crisis to a new level. These attacks must stop. The U.S. mood is shifting and continued harassment of NGOs will push things even further.

U.S. Eritrea Relations

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¶8. (C) Natsios described U.S. Eritrea relations as being at their worst level following Eritrea's diplomatic pouch violations and harassment and travel restrictions on U.S. Embassy personnel. Hostile relations are not in Eritrea's interest and these issues need to be resolved if Eritrea wants cooperation with the U.S. Ghebreab replied that some in Eritrea perceive U.S. favoritism of Ethiopia interests and feel spurned after being excluded from AGOA. He also complained about the Eritrean community center having been raided in DC and military officers having been taken from Asmara to Djibouti.

¶9. Eritrea wants to work with the U.S. on a dialogue on  
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Somalia and Sudan. While Ghebreab said Eritrea thinks U.S. policy in Somalia is "totally misguided" and ultimately harmful, Eritrea is willing to leverage its good relations with Somalia in an attempt to help the U.S. achieve on stability there.

¶10. Special Envoy Andrew Natsios' staff cleared on this message.

WHITNEY